

VZCZCXRO9559
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #0980/01 1381035
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181035Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7872
INFO RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3041
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9171
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 3647
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3511

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000980

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN AND S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2017

TAGS: PTER PREL UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKS ACKNOWLEDGE BALL IN THEIR COURT ON
COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

Classified By: CDA Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Working-level government contacts told a visiting S/CT Regional Affairs Officer that Uzbekistan is ready to cooperate with the United States on terrorism issues. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) U.S. Division Chief said that he understands that the ball is in the Uzbeks' court for responding to suggestions on how we can work together and said that a response should be forthcoming "soon." Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) representatives said that Uzbekistan has the situation with religious extremists and terrorists in hand, and is not in need of any major assistance from the United States, emphasizing that the government has chosen to deal with the issue primarily through preventative measures. both MFA and MVD officials said it would be helpful if the United States would provide more information on terrorist groups operating in the region, but had little to say when reminded that this is the same type of information that Post needs from the Government of Uzbekistan in order to calibrate its security posture. The meetings broke no new ground; not surprising since only President Karimov can authorize increased cooperation with the United States, something Post believes he is unwilling to do at this time. End summary.

MFA : Uzbekistan Interested in Cooperation

¶2. (C) Visiting S/CT Regional Affairs Officer and poloff met with MFA U.S. Division Chief Ismat Fayzullaev May 4 to discuss the status of U.S.-Uzbek cooperation on counterterrorism. Fayzullaev used the meeting to assure Emboffs that Uzbekistan remains engaged against terrorism and is eager to resume cooperation with the United States. Fayzullaev said that his government remains concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, both of which show that terrorism remains a threat to Uzbekistan. Despite this threat, he complained, Uzbekistan is constantly criticized over its counterterrorism efforts with the latest bad press coming over the Government of Uzbekistan's decision to extradite a Uygur "terrorist" with Canadian citizenship to China.

¶3. (C) Fayzullaev acknowledged that the ball is in the Government of Uzbekistan's court to respond to specific suggestions made by SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum on specific ways that cooperation could be resumed, and said that a response should be forthcoming "soon." (Comment: Fayzullaev

subsequently told poloff that he is not sure when the response will be forwarded, as it has been sent "to the top" for approval. End comment.) He said that cooperation would of necessity start slowly since we were starting almost from the beginning again. When asked what the Uzbeks hoped to gain from counterterrorism cooperation, Fayzullaev responded that the government would welcome increased information from the U.S. on terrorists and terrorist groups in Central Asia. Emboffs noted that as a step towards restarting cooperation it would be useful for the GOU to agree to provide additional security assets to the Embassy, as requested on multiple occasions. Fayzullaev said he would convey the request to appropriate authorities.

MVD: Situation Under Control

¶4. (C) Rothschild and poloff met with Abdumatal Zakurlaev, Deputy Chief of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MVD) Counterterrorism Department, and Sergei Petrochenko, Head of the CT Department's Religious Extremism branch, later on May 14. According to the MVD officers, the extremism situation in Uzbekistan is "stable" since the Ministry has successfully dealt with most Islamic Jihad Union and Hizb-ut-Tahrir members in the country. Petrochenko said that his branch keeps suspected extremists and their families under constant observation, and that lists of people of concern are distributed regularly to the leaders of mahallas (neighborhoods), schools, and other social organizations. (Comment: Petrochenko portrayed these institutions in the most benevolent light possible, claiming that their main functions include helping to guide extremists back to the path of righteousness. This may be true in some cases, but

TASHKENT 00000980 002 OF 002

they also serve as an integral part of Uzbekistan's police state by observing and reporting on individuals of concern to the government and enforcing sanctions upon those who step out of line through a combination of social pressure and harassment. End comment.)

¶5. (C) Zakurlaev claimed that Uzbekistan has little problem with Islamic radicalization in its prison population. He attributed this to the government's efforts to "re-educate" individuals sentenced on extremism charges. Every such prisoner receives regular counseling, he claimed, and Tashkent's Islamic University also conducts regular lectures on Islam as a religion of peace. Zakurlaev said that MVD has determined that it is best to "fight ideology with ideology" as the result of information suggesting that the government's re-education campaign is successful in over 90 percent of the cases. (Comment: Zakurlaev appears to have left out major parts of the government's "re-education" campaign, such as isolating prisoners jailed on extremism charges away from other prisoners and subjecting them to even harsher prison regimes than faced by run-of-the-mill inmates. End comment.)

¶6. (C) Zakurlaev said that Uzbekistan is not in need of major counterterrorism assistance. However, he said that the MVD had found previous exchanges of information with the United States to be useful and said that it would welcome an exchange of operational information on terror groups in the region. He said that the government would evaluate offers of other assistance, such as training, on a case-by-case basis. When Rothschild remarked that operational information sharing from the government would be useful in calibrating our security posture at Post, Zakurlaev said that a decision to share such information would be made at a level above his; Fayzullaev, who also attended the meeting, chimed in and said such information sharing would be possible, but only after we had rebuilt a relationship of trust between the countries.

Comment

¶7. (C) In Post's opinion these discussions broke no new ground and brought no new opportunities to engage the Uzbeks on counterterrorism cooperation. This is not surprising because, empty working level professions of willingness to work together aside, only President Islam Karimov can authorize improved cooperation. Also, neither the MFA or MVD is a major player in counterterrorism, which remains the purview of the National Security Service. We have no doubt that the Uzbeks will happily take all of the information, equipment, and at least some types of training that we are willing to provide them. However, we believe that Karimov is not interested in, and will not permit a true cooperative counterterrorism relationship with the United States at this time.

HANSON